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Obstacles and Pathways in a Meditator's Journey of Self-Awakening: *Dammanupassana* as a pathway for managing the five hindrances with a special focus on aversion and moral anger.

PRELUDE

The conference has an admirable thematic focus on issues of self-identity that meditators encounter in the secular world, and some of these challenges present us a valuable context to master the five hindrances of desire, aversion, sloth and torpor, restlessness and worry and sceptical doubt. While *cittanupassana* helps us to see clearly the different thoughts and emotions that pass through our minds, *dhammanupassana* has the remarkable gift of converting defilements into objects of meditation as *dharmatha*. During recent times, Buddhist contemplative practice centered on the higher ethics has helped me to develop the concept of moral psychology, which shall be explained in my paper.

The Transition from the Secular Ethics of a Layman's life to the Higher Ethics of a meditative life is found in the *Dhammanupassana* focus on the five hindrances. Under the influence of the hindrances one is unable to understand one's own good and why people engage in unproductive ways of seeking happiness, and even when they realise the dangers they give in to weakness of will.

In the West, Greek philosophers like Aristotle considered that such weakness of will that leads to wrong sexual behaviour and addictions may be mastered by "Reason" and Plato compared reason to a charioteer and the passions to seven unruly horses and this

metaphor has dominated Western philosophy. But the Buddha introduced the ground breaking innovative technique of “mindfulness” which can break through our “bondage to passions” in secular life and the five hindrances in the meditative life. The Buddha has also been described as a charioteer directing human beings (anuttaro purisadhamma sarati).

Mastering the Hindrances

The ability to master the five hindrances helps one to attain the five factors needed to attain absorption and the hindrances also obstruct the establishment of the awakening factors (*bojjhanga*), which is explained by the Buddha with five graphic metaphors. Simple recognition of a hindrance like anger presents the ingenious way of turning obstacles into a pathway of awakening. As a modern commentator says, the benefit can be seen in very tangible ways: “The arising of anger leads to an increase of adrenaline, and such an increase in adrenaline will further stimulate anger. The presence of non-reactive *sati* puts a break on this vicious cycle”. But if one resents or condemns anger, that reaction would be another expression of aversion. In several expositions of the gradual path in the *suttas*, it is said that the absence of the hindrances leads to delight, joy and happiness. A tranquil mind unaffected by hindrances is often described as ‘luminous’. Next, one tries to discern the conditions for the arising of the hindrance and those that assist in removing the conditions, and thus prevent future occurrence of hindrances. Thus there is a beautiful route via diagnosis, via cure, via prevention. There are also antidotes like for lust, a decaying dead body, for anger, loving kindness and patience. In deep meditative states of absorption (*kayagata Sutta*) there is a balancing with the meditative states focused on the unattractive facets of the body. There is a vital link between the mastery of the hindrances and the

deep contemplative meditations, in fact all types of meditative experience and back again, the shadows of these hindrances in secular life—the bondage to passions, below the higher ethics.

Commenting on the refined art of mastering the hindrances, Venerable Henepola Gunaratana says: "Mindfulness cannot be cultivated by struggle. It grows by realizing, by letting go, by just settling down in the moment and letting yourself be comfortable with whatever you are experiencing. This does not mean that mindfulness happens all by itself. Far from it. Energy is required. Effort is required.. gentle effort."